

SCHOOL INSPECTION SERVICE

Independent professional inspection of schools affiliated to the Steiner Waldorf Fellowship

INSPECTION REPORT

INSPECTION CARRIED OUT ACCORDING TO SECTION 162A OF THE EDUCATION ACT 2002

Name of school:	Rudolf Steiner School, South Devon
DCSF number:	878/6029
Inspection team:	Reporting Inspector: Dr Martin Bradley Supporting Inspectors: Mr Tony Hubbard Mr Mike Thirkell Lay Inspector: Mrs Helen Weatherhead
Dates of inspection:	22 nd to 24 th June 2010

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SCHOOL DETAILS

Name of school: Rudolf Steiner School, South Devon

Address of the school: Hood Manor, Dartington, Totnes, Devon, TQ9 6AB

Telephone number: 01803 897377

Fax number: 01803 897517 (Electronic) or 762374 (Manual)

Email address: enquiries@steiner-south-devon.org

Proprietor: Rudolf Steiner School South Devon Ltd.

Name of the Chair of the Trustees: Mr Christopher Cooper

Name of Administrator: Mrs Sarah Rowett

DfE number: 878/6029

Type of school: Independent school affiliated to the Steiner Waldorf Fellowship

Age range of pupils and students: 3 to 16

Gender of pupils: Male and female

Total number on roll:	(Full time)	Boys: 118	Girls: 155
	(Part time)	Boys: 0	Girls: 0

Number of children under 5

Boys:	9	Girls:	14
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Number of pupils with statements of special educational need:

Boys:	0	Girls:	1
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Annual Financial Contributions: Requested contributions in the range of £4095 to £5160; pro rata for part time pupils aged under five

Type of inspection: Section 162A of the Education Act 2002

Inspection Team: Reporting Inspector: Dr Martin Bradley
Supporting Inspectors: Mr Tony Hubbard
Mr Mike Thirkell
Lay Inspector: Mrs Helen Weatherhead

Dates of inspection: 22nd to 24th June 2010

PART A: INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY

Purpose and scope of the inspection:

This inspection was carried out by the School Inspection Service in accordance with Section 162(A) (1)(b) of the Education Act 2002, and it follows the inspection framework laid down by the Service and the Steiner Waldorf Fellowship, and agreed with the Department for Education (DfE). It was conducted by independent professional inspectors who looked at all aspects of the school's provision as required by the current regulations. The professional inspectors were accompanied by a trained lay inspector who looked at agreed aspects of the school's management and ethos and reported on these to the Steiner Waldorf Fellowship. Her findings are summarised in Section C of this document, but this section is not a statutory part of the inspection process.

Information about the school:

Rudolf Steiner School South Devon was founded by a group of parents in 1980. It is currently seeking to change its name to South Devon Steiner School. Besides the current age range of three to sixteen, it has parent and toddler groups and after-school care two days a week for Kindergarten pupils. This provision was not inspected at this time, nor was a summer school for overseas students who wish to improve their English. There are also pupils from Steiner schools elsewhere in the world in classes 9 and 10, some for a term and others for the whole year. Pupils from South Devon can attend Steiner schools abroad for up to a term whilst in Class 8 or Class 9.

The school's fundamental principles state that its work 'is an expression of three 'golden aims' suggested by Steiner:

- To receive the child in gratitude from the world they come from.
- To educate the child with love.
- To lead the child into the true freedom that belongs to humankind.'

In seeking to meet these aims, the school follows the Steiner curriculum and to impart values 'such as confidence, self-motivation, creativity, an appetite for learning, an ability to work with others, practical skills, tolerance towards others and the ability to adapt and meet change enthusiastically'.

The school follows the Steiner Waldorf system for naming classes. The corresponding National Curriculum names for the classes in the school at the time of the inspection are:

Steiner class names	National Curriculum	
Kindergarten	Nursery, Year R, Year 1	
Class 1	Year 2	Lower school
Class 2	Year 3	Do
Class 3	Year 4	Do
Class 4	Year 5	Do
Class 5	Year 6	Do

Class 6	Year 7	Do
Class 7	Year 8	Do
Class 8	Year 9	Do
Class 9	Year 10	Upper School
Class 10	Year 11	Do

Summary of main findings:

The overall quality of education provided is good and the school is generally successful in meeting its aims. It provides a stimulating environment and curriculum which enable the pupils to learn and make progress. Relationships between pupils and staff and among pupils are generally good, although at times some less good behaviour in classes reflects poor concentration by individuals. Pupils enjoy their life in school. The quality of teaching is good overall. Assessment relies heavily on discussions between teachers and their pupils although it is generally not recorded in detail and the pupils are not always clear about how well they are achieving or how they could improve. In the upper school each main lesson throughout the year has an individual report that includes students' self-assessment and is based on an agreed grading scheme. Teachers know their pupils very well and they are able to support individuals effectively. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. The provision for welfare, health and safety is good overall and has some outstanding features.

What the school does well:

- the outdoor environment is outstanding and promotes the pupils' personal and physical development extremely well;
- it has excellent relationships with parents;
- provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) is outstanding; and
- particularly good care is provided for the pupils

What the school must do to comply with the regulations:

- the school meets the regulatory requirements.

What the school must do to comply with the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 2002:

- the school meets the requirements of the DDA.

PART B: COMPLIANCE WITH REGULATIONS FOR REGISTRATION

The quality of education provided by the school

The quality of the curriculum

The quality of the curriculum is good. It provides pupils of all ages and abilities with a suitably wide range of learning opportunities. Appropriate emphasis is given to developing pupils' literacy, including speaking and listening skills, and their numeracy. At all levels the curriculum is enriched by opportunities for pupils to develop their sensitivity to a range of experiences through classes in woodwork and other crafts, music and gardening.

The extensive grounds provide pupils with a rich opportunity for developing an appreciation of horticultural skills and an appreciation of high quality and nutritious foods through well organised activities. Provision for gardening is outstanding. Opportunities for physical development are good, including eurythmy, an expressive movement art. The main lesson, which is characteristic of the Steiner curriculum, provides an integrated approach to learning, including English and mathematics, and takes place each morning for two hours throughout the school from Class 1 to Class 10.

The school's curriculum policy broadly outlines the school's provision and affirms its commitment and adherence to the Steiner Waldorf approach to child development. Whole school planning is guided by the Steiner Waldorf Fellowship's curriculum documentation which the school interprets in response to pupils' changing learning needs, guided by teachers' observations and evaluations. The curriculum is carefully planned and is set out in the school's annual Curriculum Year Plan. The plan sets out the purpose of each aspect of the provision in each year and its aims and objectives. Together with more detailed planning documents it clarifies pupils' intended progression through the school year. Plans for class and subject work vary in quality and detail. Pupils in Classes 9 and 10 are able to take up to four subjects at General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) level. A number of older pupils take additional subjects, for example art, physics and biology, privately at another local school.

Pupils identified as having learning difficulties or a statement of special educational need are well supported. A suitably detailed individual education plan (IEP) has been prepared for the pupil with a statement and appropriate strategies for support are established. All pupils with learning difficulties have suitable individual support plans. Although there are established strategies for passing information about individual pupil's learning needs to teachers, these are not reflected in their short-term and lesson planning.

The curriculum is enhanced by a suitable range of extra-curricular and enrichment activities. Class 10 pupils speak with enthusiasm about their trip to Germany. Extra-curricular music lessons contribute to the high proportion of pupils who learn to play an instrument. Pupils enjoy playing classical and other forms of music in groups of different sizes. Festivals are celebrated throughout the school year and play an important part in bringing a sense of rhythm to the year.

The school includes personal, social and health education throughout the curriculum and this is identified through school policies and plans. Careers education is suitably provided for along with pupils' developing social and communication skills. Class 10 students say that they have been well supported for their forthcoming courses in sixth forms and colleges. The local Connexions service helps them to explore opportunities for further education. As a result of their curriculum experience, and because they develop confidence and good communication skills pupils are well prepared for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of their future lives.

The quality of teaching and assessment

The quality of teaching is good overall and pupils make good progress, developing their understanding and skills in the subjects taught. In the majority of lessons, the pupils are encouraged to show interest in their work and to think and learn for themselves. This is supported by the deep knowledge which the teachers have about their pupils and the high levels of care provided. The oldest pupils form a choir whose singing was outstanding, with four part unaccompanied harmonies being sensitively developed using excellent skills both when sight reading scores and singing known pieces. The pupils take great care in listening to the other parts and blending their contributions to these. Elsewhere, in a minority of lessons, poor and disruptive behaviour by a few pupils restricts the learning of the whole class. In such instances the boundaries of acceptable behaviour are not always enforced. Lessons are well planned and the teachers have a good knowledge and understanding of the subject matter. The teaching methods used are appropriate and the pace of the lesson is good, enabling teachers to overcome disruptive behaviour when this occurs. The school is able to draw upon the services of support staff who are familiar with the Steiner approach.

The school has sought to ensure that classroom and other resources are of adequate quality, quantity and range, and staff make effective use of these both indoors and out. Care is taken to ensure that the pupils use materials appropriately.

Teachers make good on-going assessments of the pupils, and these are often given during lessons when work is discussed at some length. Teachers know the pupils very well: individuals' strengths and areas for development are known, but these are less well recorded in ways which enable the pupils' to build upon previous work and to deal with areas of weakness. Staff undertake detailed child studies to deepen their understanding of how to support individual pupils' learning and development effectively. Any significant concerns are well documented. The school is extending this good practice from those with identified learning or social needs to include all pupils so that the effectiveness of the records and the pupils' well-being throughout the school as a whole can be assessed and monitored more fully.

Pupils' progress is generally evaluated against the school's stated aims for Steiner Waldorf education. This is effective, although the small numbers taking national examinations for the GCSE make year-on-year comparisons inappropriate.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

The personal development of the pupils is good and in many respects outstanding. Pupils are able to develop their own personalities through the tolerant values promoted by all staff and the high quality of relationships amongst pupils and between pupils and staff in almost every respect. With the excellent support of their class teachers, pupils show confidence in their own personal worth and respect and understanding for others. This is often evident in their writing, such as in the moving diary of a Cherokee squaw caught up on the Trail of Tears in 1838, written for the son that might survive her. Pupils say they thoroughly enjoy their time at the school and manifestly take pleasure in one another's companionship during lessons and in break times.

Because of the special nature of their surroundings, pupils learn to be sensitive to their environment and to be physically adventurous, in climbing and balancing. They are particularly aware of the importance of the environment, coming to understand how to build and to grow food in a way that minimises the use of artificial resources and energy.

The school is a very close-knit community, to which all pupils contribute at all levels. This is evident in their preparations for the St John's day celebrations, for which every class had to create its own placard to represent its rite of passage from the old to the new academic year. All pupils help to keep their classrooms clean and tidy. Those in Class 8 act as buddies for pupils in Class 1 and make wooden toys for them. One pupil in Class 2 was overheard saying to a group of friends that "everybody looks after each other here." They are well prepared for the economic aspects of their future lives. During their visit to Germany pupils set up an English café in the local Christmas market and performed a cabaret.

Much of the time pupils' behaviour is excellent and overall it is good. They understand the difference between right and wrong and in general they respect the reasonable rules that exist. During break times and around the school they are well behaved and polite to staff and visitors. In most of their lessons, they are well behaved. However, in a small number of lessons, pupils, possibly overexcited at the prospect of the forthcoming St John's festivities, did not manage their behaviour or in all cases respond to the teacher's reminders. This is less evident in the older classes, but pupils from Class 6 upwards commented that poor behaviour was not always dealt with effectively, despite the majority behaving responsibly.

The school has a number of pupils from other countries for a term or a year. This promotes all pupils' awareness of and sensitivity to diversity and the needs to understand and be tolerant of diverse faiths and cultures. They learn about different beliefs and values through their study of history, and, from their studies of RE, they are aware of the major world faiths. Because of the daily emphasis on aesthetic and physical aspects of the curriculum, they are particularly sensitive to these aspects of cultural life.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

The welfare, health and safety of pupils

The teachers and staff take good care to safeguard the wellbeing, health and safety of all pupils. Particular strengths are the knowledge staff have of their pupils and the trouble and care to identify and address any concerns. Pastoral care is truly integrated into the process of teaching and learning. Pupils express great confidence in their teachers and all readily identified staff to whom they would go. The school seeks to review and continuously improve its satisfactory arrangements for safeguarding pupils' welfare and for their safety. The school's arrangements for securing good behaviour, linked to its effective policy to prevent bullying, are clear and largely effective.

The school's safeguarding practices are appropriate and it has been reviewing and upgrading its procedures and records to ensure that they are even more robust. The school has a suitable policy for child protection and co-operation between agencies to keep children safe. The designated safeguarding officer and her deputy have up-to-date interagency training and have made sure all staff have basic training and awareness of the school's procedures. The school has a written First Aid policy that includes appropriate arrangements for first aid, and an ample number of staff have either basic or higher level training. Appropriate records of accidents and incidents are maintained. Activities both in school and on trips and visits are carefully assessed for risk. The school has systematic procedures for ensuring the general safety of the premises and equipment and carries out a regular fire risk assessment. Appropriate admissions and attendance records are maintained, and particular care is taken to make sure that parents are made aware of any unauthorised absence as soon as possible. The school has responded to a recommendation from the last inspection by drawing up and implementing an appropriate access plan.

The daily life and experiences of pupils in the school ensure that they are particularly aware of the importance of living and eating healthily and of being physically active. Every day they reflect on the importance of the natural world. They are encouraged to eat fruit and a particularly good range of fresh vegetables. Teachers of younger children are meticulous in insisting that hats are worn in the sun. Pupils' experience of gardening gives them an exceptional understanding of how food is produced.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

The school meets the regulatory requirements for the suitability of the proprietor and staff. Appropriate checks are made on staff and others working at the school, including Trustees. A single central register is well maintained and records checks made on those working in the school. It is supplemented by information held in staff files, supporting the safeguarding of pupils.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

Suitability of the premises and accommodation

The school's premises and accommodation serve the needs of the school and the Steiner philosophy well. They are suitable to meet the needs of pupils of all ages and abilities attending the school. The extensive grounds, which cover nearly seven acres, provide pupils with a rich and stimulating range of outdoor learning experiences. Comments from pupils reflect their appreciation of the grounds and their positive views of their impact on their learning experience. The grounds are a central feature of the school's aims for pupils' learning and development.

The school buildings include the main building which is a listed building, containing classrooms and administrative offices, and a large new wooden building containing classrooms and a hall. A range of other individual buildings provide suitable specialist accommodation, including art, science, information and communication technology (ICT) and woodwork and other crafts. A specialist art room, built by the school, provides a personal space for older pupils to develop their ideas and work. All buildings meet the needs of the curriculum and are suitably maintained. The extensive grounds are extremely well utilized as a learning resource to encourage the development of a sense of independence and adventure in children, and to support the development of their sensitivity to nature and to natural materials. A relatively recent fire deprived the school of its hall. The school is aware of its responsibility to keep matters relating to health and safety under constant review given the nature of its grounds and the stimulating learning environment they are planned to provide.

The nature of the buildings and grounds and, in particular, the high profile given to gardening and horticulture in the curriculum, places considerable challenge to keep the buildings clean at all times. Despite these difficulties the school maintains suitable standards of cleanliness, tidiness and hygiene. Classrooms are of adequate size, are generally well organised and are appropriately furnished to meet the needs of the children using them. The school has sufficient washroom and toilet facilities for the number of pupils and has now provided suitable facilities for pupils who may become ill during the school day. It now meets the regulatory requirements relating to these issues which were identified at the last inspection.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

The quality of information for parents

The provision of information to parents is good. Information on school policies and events is readily available on the website, in reception and on the notice board in the parents' room. The website also has useful links to Steiner Waldorf resources and organisations worldwide. A weekly newsletter, the Friday Flier, is a colourful publication and contains examples of children's work, information about the curriculum and articles of topical interest. It also publishes the minutes of the mandate circle meetings.

A Parents' Handbook contains key information for parents and the production of a prospectus is currently in progress. The parents' information pack is given to

parents of prospective pupils. This contains all necessary details regarding the admissions procedure and contributions system, as well as general information about the school. The Community Support and Information Group (CoSI) helps to welcome and support new parents. It maintains the spacious and friendly parents' room, which also houses the school shop.

Class contacts act as a valuable channel of communication between class teachers and parents. Parents' evenings are normally held once a term and parents receive an annual written report on their children's progress. These reports also address the children personally, acknowledging individual strengths and outlining future steps in learning. In the upper school, parents and pupils receive on-going reports with each main lesson. As part of the behaviour policy, a reflection form may be issued to pupils. These are completed by the pupils, signed by parents and returned to school. This helpful form of home/school liaison enables parents to be aware of their children's behaviour in school. An excellent practice for maintaining parent/teacher links is the use, in the younger classes, of a home/school notebook. Each child has such a notebook in which any event at home or at school, either positive or negative, which needs to be communicated, may be recorded. The book is brought to school each day and is reviewed weekly.

Sixty four questionnaires were returned by parents and carers. They indicated overwhelming satisfaction with the education their children are receiving and widespread support generally for the school.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

The effectiveness of the school's complaints procedure

The school's concerns and complaints procedures are fully compliant with regulations. An especially helpful feature of the process is the work of the Mediation Group. This group, formed of staff, parents and council members, some with specialist training, offer to facilitate the resolution of differences and concerns before they escalate.

There were no complaints in the last year.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

PART C: ORGANISATION AND MANAGEMENT

This section is not a requirement of the Education Act 2002. The business organisation and management of the school were inspected by the Lay Inspector, who has written this section of the report.

The quality of the organisation and management of the school

The school is a registered charity which is administered by the Council of Management on behalf of the Association of the Rudolf Steiner School of South Devon. Association meetings are open for all to attend, but membership is restricted to those who have been involved in Steiner education for at least two years or who are members of the Anthroposophical Society. The Association meets annually to gain an overview of the work of the school over the previous year, agree the financial accounts and elect council members who, as Trustees, are also directors of the company.

Over the last five years, there have been a series of organisational reviews which has resulted in the development of the current management system. The school is dedicated to maintaining the principle of management in a consensual, non-hierarchical way. While this presents a challenge in terms of educational governance and organisation, the school is achieving an increasingly high level of professionalism. Following Rudolf Steiner's indications for social organisation, three distinct areas are identified. The cultural life of the school embraces the education, arts and creative life; the rights sphere deals with management, responsibility and accountability; and the economic life relates to finance, facilities and physical resources.

It is heartening that every statement of the school ethos or description of management places the children first and foremost. In their weekly meetings the Collegiate of Teachers reviews the educational welfare of the school and upholds the spiritual impulse underlying it. These meetings include artistic activity, anthroposophical study, festival preparation and curriculum work. They are open to all teachers, are well attended and have created a sense of inclusion among the teaching body. For those who feel they can commit to even deeper working on guiding and shaping pedagogical principles and policy, there is an extended Collegiate meeting. The Education Co-ordinator supports staff turning policy into practice.

In the weekly departmental meetings of Early Years, Lower and Upper school teachers, child studies and day-to-day discussions take place. This contributes to each teacher's intimate understanding of pupils. It was noted during the inspection, however, that there were occasions when some children disrupted lessons. There may be several contributory factors: not least the time of year and the approaching festival. It may be worth exploring this further and finding ways to ensure that all children are enabled to make the most of their education.

To ensure the smooth running of all aspects of the school, in addition to an Education Co-ordinator, there are co-ordinators, also appointed by the Trustees, who oversee administration, facilities, personnel, communication, and finance. Within these areas are mandates led by named mandate holders. Co-ordinators and mandate holders meet at the monthly Mandate Circle meeting. Here reports are given, proposals discussed, decisions announced. Anyone with the interest and ability to commit to regular attendance may attend the meeting. This is highly effective in creating openness and transparency. It is a striking feature of the school

that the minutes of these meetings, including all reports, are published each month in the school newsletter.

This structured system is highly defined with clear guidance on roles and responsibilities for all mandate holders and co-ordinators. It has served to provide clarity and an increased sense of individual responsibility. In turn it has improved the management of meetings, focused decision making and supported effective and efficient working.

An impressive feature of the school is the genuine working partnership between parents and staff. When children join the school, their parents take on not only a financial commitment but also pledge to contribute in terms of time, energy and talents. Parents undertake many and varied tasks in the school and can join any mandate group if they have the expertise and interest. On several occasions, staff paid tribute to this partnership which is an essential aspect of the school's life. Together a beautiful environment has been created where the children are flourishing and clearly enjoy their days at school.

Could the organisation and management be improved?

To enable all pupils to conduct themselves in the most positive way and to enable pupils to complete their secondary education at the South Devon Steiner School, the Council, Collegiate and relevant mandates might consider:

- re-evaluating the implementation of the admissions policy and of the behaviour management policy; and
- continuing to work actively with the Steiner Schools' Fellowship, the European Upper School Curriculum Development Group and other organisations to establish additional accreditation pathways for secondary age pupils and to extend the current age range to include Classes 11 and 12.

PART D: EARLY YEARS FOUNDATION STAGE

The overall effectiveness of the provision for the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)

The setting is effective in meeting the needs of children in the EYFS. The staff take great care in reviewing their work to ensure that they have a good capacity to maintain continuous improvement. Policies, procedures and practices are regularly reviewed and the staff's commitment to their work and the needs of the children is exemplary.

The EYFS has, like the rest of the school, a collegiate approach to its leadership and management, although a member of staff is identified as the overall leader for administration purposes. The shared approach is extremely effective in promoting improvement and is, in turn, very well supported by parents and others who provide help, such as in maintaining the very high quality outdoor play areas. This support is a major strength of the provision. Resources are well deployed and equality and diversity are promoted very effectively. Safeguarding of the children's welfare is good. The EYFS self evaluation is clear and realistic: it promotes improvement and staff discussions constantly review their work, seeking positive solutions to any issues. Links have been made with Devon County Council in relation to the assessment of the EYFS. The Council supported the school's successful application for exemptions from aspects of the EYFS.

The quality of the provision in the EYFS is outstanding. The staff promote parents' awareness of the rhythms of the year, the week and the day to emphasise their importance for the children's learning and as a means of developing shared practices and ideas between the home and school. Excellent use is made of the outside areas. These have been developed to an extremely high standard and are well maintained by both the adults and the children: these areas are a major feature of the provision and parents commented that they particularly valued them. The children enjoy their learning in this environment, and their achievement is high, especially in social aspects. They rightly feel safe and confident to play beyond the immediate supervision of adults within the secure grounds. The snacks, including soup and other cooked foods, are of high quality and encourage healthy eating. This approach is supported in the information given to parents which includes recipes, and also when organic produce from the school gardens is sold to parents. The children willingly contribute to the classes, tidying materials and equipment away, and supporting one another such as in action rhymes and other activities. As they become older and more able to play together and empathise with each others' feelings, they develop very good skills for their future life and learning

Does the school meet the statutory requirements?

Yes.

This report has been prepared by the School Inspection Service, which provides independent professional inspection of all schools affiliated to the Steiner Fellowship. Further copies of the report are available from the School Inspection Service website: www.schoolinspectionservice.co.uk.